

## Agriculture listening session in Escondido

### Intro:

My name is Tom Nassif and I am the President and CEO of Western Growers.

We represent nearly 3,000 members who grow, pack and ship 90 percent of the fresh vegetables and 70 percent of the fresh fruits and nuts grown in California and Arizona.

This accounts for half of the fresh produce grown in the United States.

I would like to begin my comments today by thanking the California State Board of Food and Agriculture and the California Department of Food and Agriculture for the opportunity to participate in the development of a shared vision for the future of California agriculture.

Over the past month and a half, as you have conducted these listening sessions up and down the state, I know you've heard from many people, both inside and outside of agriculture, offering their thoughts and suggestions for where they would like to see California agriculture in 20 years.

I am confident that you will take all of these exceptional ideas into consideration when developing the long-term strategic vision for agriculture in the state.

You have asked each of us to answer questions regarding our own vision for Ca. agriculture by 2030. You know only too well that the answer will depend upon whether and how we address the most challenging issues facing us in the years preceding 2030.

I envision a California where farming is once again one of the most honorable professions in the nation.

A California where its people enhance the quality of their lives and those of their children through good health brought about by nutritious diets that include fresh fruits, vegetables and tree nuts.

I long for a state and country where the best interests of the people, its farmers, environmentalists and conservationists intersect by eschewing political solutions and embracing those solutions which are science-based.

Where the air is clean, the water pure, and the toils of labor reduced through innovation and technology.

I hope for a place where our produce will be completely safe from any type of contamination.

And a day when the flavors we remember from our childhood will be the norm and not the exception.

Where we enhance the nutritional value of our food supply and reduce our seemingly inevitable slide toward poor health, and life-ending diseases.

In summary, I look forward to the day when our food supply will again be the best medicine in the world.

These things are at the heart of our vision for agriculture by the year 2030.

You have asked us about the challenges that would prevent us from making our vision a reality? They are almost too numerous to mention, so let me start with this.

Last year I was appointed to the Commission for Economic Development by the Governor and asked by the Lt. Governor who chairs the committee to be the Vice Chairman.

I asked my fellow commissioners if we could establish an Agricultural Advisory Committee where all aspects of CA. agriculture could be represented. My request was granted, the committee formed, and subcommittees established to research, evaluate and recommend to the Commission advice on agriculture for further use by the Governor and the legislature.

The members were asked about the most challenging issues facing agriculture and to participate in those subcommittees that were responsible for vetting the issues of particular concern to them.

Of course they included regulatory costs, property rights, pest and disease prevention and eradication, international trade, sustainability, messaging, communications and public relations, education, and others.

However, the two most important issues raised in my view, are the need for a stable and legal workforce and the inadequacy of our State water supply.

Water:

Perhaps the most pressing challenge facing California farmers is the availability of water.

At the beginning of last month, the Governor proclaimed a statewide drought.

The irony is that California has plenty of water to meet its current and future needs.

The problem is that we lack the facilities to properly store our abundant supply of water and do not have the infrastructure in place to convey it to the areas with the highest demand.

Therefore, as a prerequisite to any 20-year strategic plan for agriculture, the current water crisis must be addressed with the immediate development of surface and groundwater storage facilities, as well as a timely resolution to the Delta conveyance situation.

As we are all well aware, complicating any plan to develop additional water supplies are the restrictions placed on water use by the federal and state Endangered Species Act.

Because of the strict environmental regulations imposed by these laws, judges are unable to render decisions that balance the economic interest of the state with alleged threats to endangered species.

In their efforts to protect endangered species in California, legislators, regulators and activist environmental groups have unwittingly created another endangered species: the California farmer.

Labor:

In addition to water supply, California farmers face the urgent question of farm labor availability.

The lack of a legal, stable workforce and the failure of federal comprehensive immigration reform are cited as the primary reasons why many of our members have relocated their operations to other countries.

The pending penalties related to the DHS No-Match Rule and the absence of a workable guest worker program has jeopardized the future of farming in California.

Additionally, our neighbors to the east have pushed through their state legislature the Arizona Employer Sanctions Law, which carries with it a business death provision.

Thankfully, we have avoided such drastic measures here in California, but we have already killed a similar bill in our legislature and I predict that it will become increasingly difficult to block future employer sanctions bills at the state level.

Combined with the problems stemming from uncertainties in water availability and the rising cost of doing business in the state, an employer sanctions bill would be the proverbial straw that breaks the back of California agriculture.

#### Conclusion:

Given these immediate threats to the long-term viability of California agriculture, it is plain to see that without addressing the needs of our industry today, a vision through 2030 will be irrelevant.

To ensure the future sustainability of California agriculture, we must have the courage at both the state and national level to deal with the pressing issues facing the industry.

The problem in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., however, is that our representatives lack the political will to take on these pressing challenges.

Instead of doing the right thing and breaking ground on new water conveyance and storage facilities, streamlining the cumbersome and burdensome regulatory environment, or passing comprehensive immigration reform, they sit on their hands until the problems become too big to resolve or they suggest partial solutions which are woefully inadequate.

Fortunately, I believe that we are not quite to the point of no return yet, but let's not wait until we are.

On behalf of the members of Western Growers, thank you for the opportunity to express these concerns facing the agricultural industry here in California.